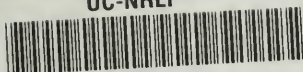


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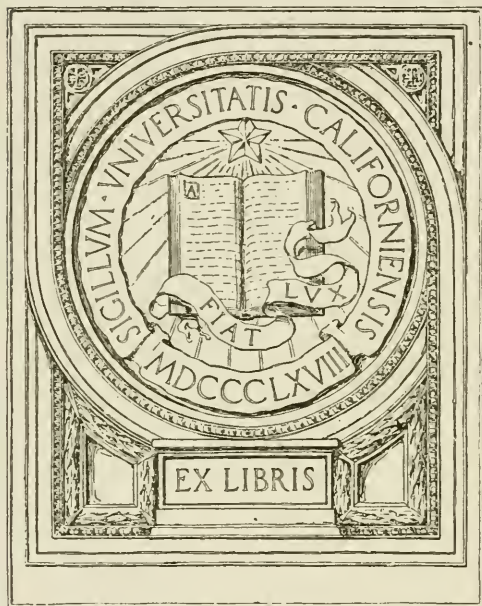


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BETWIXT TWO SEAS

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BETWIXT TWO SEAS

POEMS AND BALLADS

(WRITTEN AT CONSTANTINOPLE AND THERAPIA)

BY

VIOLET FANE

LONDON

JOHN C. NIMMO

14 KING WILLIAM STREET, STRAND

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TO
MY HUSBAND

b

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BETWIXT TWO SEAS

BETWIXT two seas, upon the shore
Of waters blue that dance and gleam,
I roam beneath the shade, and dream
The same old dreams as heretofore ;

With stormy menace in each crest
That crowns her restless waves with light,
Beyond the strait, below the height,
The Euxine bares her ruffling breast,

Whilst there, o'er mosque and minaret
That rise against the sunset glow,
Outspread the lands I do not know,
The seas I have not sailed as yet.

And ever as I muse and dream,
The stream of Life, from sea to sea,
Now dark with drift, now fair and free,
Goes hurrying on like yonder stream,

Behind, lies Youth's impetuous tide,
Fleck'd with the trace of storms and tears :
This stream is as these midway years
That more untroubled seem to glide,

Whilst far beyond all fume and fret,
Beyond the golden sunset glow,
Outspread the lands I do not know,
The seas I have not sailed as yet.

Therapia, 1895.

A DESERTED PALACE

THE Autumn's scatterings on each stair
That lead up from the water's edge,
Lie leaf on leaf, and layer on layer,
And smother every ledge ;

The winding paths, the garden bowers,
Are all with thistles overgrown,
Only the great magnolia flowers
Bloom sadly on alone ;

A serving man, bent, old, and grey,
Leads on towards the palace door,
Adjusts, anon, a rusty key,
And lo, we tread its floor :---

High vaulted as some sacred aisle,
And all so gay with glass and gold,
With bright brocade, and velvet-pile,
The eye aches to behold !

Splendid and vast, yet none the less
A hollow shell, an aimless thing ;
A house of Void and Nothingness
Whence Soul hath taken wing.

Room after room : green, purple, red,
Crystal and gold (aye, always gold !)
The very echoes must have fled,
Our steps fall sharp and cold.

To grim old mansions, far away,
Where now perpetual silence reigns,
My spirit turns ; I see the day
Stream thro' their diamond panes,

To light on broider'd arras-fold,
On pictured face, and learned tome,
And show that those now lying cold
Once made that house their home,

Wherein their presence lurks, until
We almost seem to feel their breath,
And catch the fervid throb and thrill
Of hearts long still'd in death ;

But *here*, what beings lived and died ?
—What human sympathies remain ?
—What clinging memories abide ?
We ask, but ask in vain !

The minds of Sultan, mistress, slave,
That dwelt within this marble hall,
No passing colour lent or gave :—
Nay, had they minds at all ?

Above, below, in every part,

We seem to seek some influence faint,
As men might strive to find the heart
Beneath a harlot's paint,

Yet find it not : and as, maybe,

In sadness, these might turn aside,
Once more heart-whole and fancy-free
To woo some modest bride,—

E'en thus we quit, as daylight sets,

This mansion, void of hearth or host ;
—A place too garish for regrets,
Too empty for a ghost !

A DESERTED VILLAGE

HERE, where but yesterday a village smiled,
How strange and pitiful, to-day, to see
Its dwellings, by Imperial decree,
Laid level with the earth! One lonely child,
Standing beside a heap of faggots, piled
A full foot higher than her fell'd roof-tree,—
Fondling a captured hoopoe, seems to be
The only human thing amidst the wild!

The mighty forest, black against the glow
Of dying daylight, with its depths profound,
Its silences, its mysteries, around,
Fades into dreamland. Haply, even so
Some Hampshire hamlet may have look'd,—laid low
When our Red King prepared his hunting-ground!

CHILDHOOD

I

TIME of long ling'ring days,
Of onward-straining eyes,
Of undiscover'd ways,
And shrouded mysteries !
When the great God of all
Leant down to hear our pray'rs,
Mark'd e'en the sparrow's fall,
And number'd all our hairs !
When Christ for us was poor,
And hung upon the tree,
And Death,—no tyrant sure—
Whose pitiless decree,
Fix'd as the firmament,
No man may slight or shun,

Came but as accident,
And mere mischance, to one ;
Then all undreaded went,
As though his work were done !

II

And what if the heart was gay,
The passionate tears soon dried,
To-morrow, e'en as to-day,
Our tribute of trust untried ?
And what if the groves were sweet
With flow'rs that have faded since,
And trod of the tripping feet
Of fairy and fairy Prince ?
'Twas ever beyond, beyond,
We gazed with impatient eyes,
Whene'er the grey twilight donn'd
Her glory of sunset skies ;
Then the signs and the wonders grew,—
The seraphs with shining wings,

The horsemen that closed and drew,
The dragons and wingèd things,
Like those that once ramp'd and flew
Up over the casques of kings.

III

'Twas thus that the days drifted by,
And, all careless, we watched them close,
Whilst farewell twitter and cry
From the heart of the woodland rose ;
How black, from the warm cot-nest,
Out over the nursery bars,
Loom'd the swaying Scotch fir-tree's crest,
So soon to be crown'd with its stars !
And how bright, in the sweet Spring morn,
Rose the great round sun overhead !
How blithe was the bird in the thorn,
The bee in the garden bed !
Thus drifted the hurrying hours,
Till lo ! a step at the door,

And a breath o'er the garden bow'rs
That had never breathed there before,
And Love, half hidden in flow'rs,
Whispered "Thou art a child no more."

AN ANCIENT ASIATIC HORSE-SHOE

WHEN this grey world was young, and Tubal-Cain,
Blind Lamech's son, from the first anvil sent
The red sparks flying thro' his smithy-tent,
Who, of all mortal men, did first attain
The art of forging lance-head, stirrup, chain,
And sword-blade, and, with Jubal, did invent
Harp, cymbal, drum, and fluted instrument,
Ere on the Earth descended the long rain ;

Then, maybe, ancient relic ! obsolete
Of form and fashion, out of virgin ore
Thou wert contrived, and, haply, may'st have shod
In those old days with miracle replete,
The hoof of some such prancing steed as bore
A prophet's fiery chariot up to God !

AT THE "TOURBÈ" OF ROXALANA

WHERE rarely sunbeam of the morn,
Or ev'ning moonbeam ever stray'd,
Above the ground she trod in scorn,
Here, draped in samite and brocade,
Behold the great Sultāna laid,
Of all her fleeting greatness shorn !

"*Khureem Soldāné!*" Ere the span
That made the measure of thy day,
'Twixt Taurus and Carpathian
Had flourish'd many a lady gay,
Who each in turn had held her sway,
And been belov'd of Suleymān ;

Yet none, for all her beauty's might,
In Queenly craft could vie with thee,
Whom men have "Roxalana" hight,
Red Russian from the Baltic Sea,
Whose deeds, in ages still to be,
Shall stalk, uncover'd, in the light.

Thy smiles, thy wiles, thy sighs and tears
Our fathers and our grandsires knew ;—
Thy rhythmic phrases charm'd their ears,
And we have heard their echo, too,
And seen thy fair face peeping thro'
The parted curtains of the years ;

Whilst here, two thousand miles away,
Three hundred years hast thou lain dead
(Where I have sought thy shrine, to-day,
By stern white-turban'd *Mollāh* led),
With tassell'd lamps above thy head
And carpets spread in rich array ;

The walls that shut thee from the sun
The potter's art made bright with blue,
Where leaf and tendril overrun
The Persian porcelain's ivory hue,
And blazon'd letters, twisting thro',
Proclaim there is no God but One ;

Without, the scented roses twine,
The *Suleymānieh* tow'rs o'erhead,
The flagstones, flecked with shade and shine,
Re-echo to the pilgrim's tread,
And soft grey doves their wings outspread
In the blue vault above thy shrine ;

And almost might we seem to be
(So sweet the spirit of repose
That breathes alike o'er thee and me
From that One God the Moslem knows),
In some serene Cathedral-close
In Christian lands beyond the sea.

Ah, Lady fair! (this thought steals o'er
My mind, beneath thy burial-fane)
If, when the one that guards thy door
Lies firmly bound in slumber's chain,
Thou, flitting forth, couldst gaze again
On scenes thou knew'st so well of yore,

With what a thrill of sad surprise
At changes wrought by time and tide
Whilst thou wert sleeping, would thine eyes
Newly awaken'd, open wide,
Thou, that had'st once thy place beside
The "mightiest of Majesties"!

No Soldān ever saw the light
That was more famed or fear'd than he
Who bow'd, a bond-slave, in thy sight!
He was the lord of land and sea,
And twice his thumb was on the key
That warded Europe from his might.

Sleep, Lady, Sleep! His reign is o'er!

Sloth and Corruption taint the air;—

Thou *Tourbédār*! make fast the door

Lest Roxalana forth should fare!

Yea, tho' men smite and do not spare

His pow'r is gone for ever more!

Gone in his glory from the sea;

Gone in his greatness from the land;

The Armies starve and Mutiny,*

The galleys rot upon the strand;

Without the walls the nations stand

And wait for what the end may be;

Then, here, where sunbeams rarely stray,

Or moonbeams pierce yon tinted pane,

Hide, Roxalana! from the day

Wherein thine ancient glories wane,

Nor wake to see the jackals reign

Where once the Lion held his sway!

* Descriptive of the state of affairs previous to the last war.

JUDAS TREE AND HAWTHORN

I

BECAUSE thy leaf is like a heart
 Oh, Judas tree !
Whilst buds, like rosy tear-drops, start
 From heart of thee ;
Because thou blushest thro' the land
 When Spring-tide blooms,
And by the faithful cypress-band,
 Amongst the tombs,
Weepest pink petals night and day
 O'er those that lie
'Neath turban'd tombstones prone and grey
 Where sad winds sigh ;—

Because of this, oh, Judas tree,
 Tho' still men tell
That gruesome old-world tale of thee
 I love thee well !

II

My heart would wing to England, now,
 O'er land and sea,
To meadows, where, from burden'd bough,
 Our Judas-tree,—
The hawthorn-herald of the Spring
 When light winds blow,
Strews on the sward its fairy-ring
 Of flow'r-flaked snow.
Beyond, the well-known village spire
 Rises on high,
Above the thatch of barn and byre
 Nestling hard by ;

JUDAS TREE AND HAWTHORN

Oh, weeping, heart-leaf'd Judas tree

With budding breast!

I love, for all my love of thee,

Our hawthorn best!

A LOVE CHARM

AN EASTERN SUPERSTITION

OII, beware of the scent of the barberry-blossom
That hangs on the barberry-tree ;
For, but fold it away, for a day, in thy bosom,
Where no man may seek it or see,
And the heart that beats under the barberry-blossom
Shall yield all its secrets to me !

The berries will drop, like red blood, from the branches
When summer has had her day,
And the wild wind that scatters, the hoar frost that blanches
Will each of them have their way,
And, all bare will become the brown barberry branches
'Neath skies that are gloomy and grey,

But the heart that beat under the barberry-blossom
Will drink in its scent like wine,
And the passionate throb of thy wakening bosom
Shall serve thee for warning and sign,
Then beware of the scent of the barberry-blossom
Before it hath made thee mine !

“FOR ONE MAN’S PLEASURE”

TWO magpies sought my garden-glade,
 (It brings good luck to look at *two* !)
 Tho’ not as billing ring-doves woo
Do pies discourse of love ! They made
A grievous chatter in the shade :
 But, by-and-by, with much ado,
 They built a nest, and then I knew
I should be lucky whilst they stay’d !
I ween two blither fowl than these,
 You had not seen beneath the sun !
 Wherefore, the gard’ner took a gun
And shot one near the early peas,—
The sad mate lingers, ill at ease ;
 (It bodes bad luck to look at *one* !)

“KING, BY THE GRACE OF GOD”

“I STAND the type of God on earth
With crown and sceptre, orb and ring,
His vassal-planets told my birth
After long years of star-gazing ;
The land was glad thro’ all its girth ;
The people cried ‘ Long live the King ! ’

“When liegemen trudge thro’ mud and mire
I ride in chariot, prance on steed ;
My board is spread at my desire,
I feast when others barely feed,
My palace-hearth glows warm with fire
While poor men crouch in cold and need.

"The very waves dare not withstand
My thrall, but crawl to lap my feet
Who am the lord of sea and sand,
Of fighting-band and sailing-fleet ;
There is no lady in the land
Who would not deem my kisses sweet.

"Do I but set my spear in rest,
Or chance to buckle on my mail,
Lo, horsemen spur to East and West
And North and South, to tell the tale,—
My careless word, my thoughtless jest,
Can make men falter and turn pale,

"And when that Pow'r who will not spare
Or King, or Lord, or Commoner,
Shall, haply, smite me, unaware,
Wrapped soft in silk and miniver
The worm will miss his wonted fare
Who brooks not cassia and myrrh.

"My sire, before I saw the light,
To serve Christ's cause, in sorry need,
Set sail with many a gallant knight
For paynim lands, who gain'd for meed
A hero's death in thick of fight,
So was I born a king indeed ;

"And well I mind me when I came
Unscathed, from that same Holy War,
And heard my people's loud acclaim
Who throng'd and shouted round my car,
Methought in secret : 'Small their blame ;
'The King is not as others are !'

"But now I marvel in my heart,
Why men should set me up so high,
And yield me, thus, the better part
Of all they strive for ere they die,
Who see each day at Mass and Mart
An hundred worthier than I ;

"And once, ere grown to man's estate,
I, (stretch'd beside the Yule-tide blaze,
When links were burning low and late
After the minstrels ceased their lays,)
Heard, and half heard, the old wives prate
About the things of bygone days ;

"How, when the King was at the war,
The Queen, my mother, faring forth,
With one that was mere servitor
And poor Esquire, to all men's wrath
Made over-free, and, furthermore,
Would tryst him in the garden-garth ;

" 'Wherefore,' they said, 'our King is fair ;
(The old King's cheek was sear'd and brown ;)
That stripling was a marksman rare,
And lo, his shaft that wears the crown
Can wing the falcon high in air,
And bring the green-neck'd mallard down.'

"And so, some streak of common clay
May fleck my Kinghood after all!
Once, well nigh sick to death, I lay,
And I beheld my first-born fall
Heart-smitten in a border-fray,
And saw the maidens sew his pall.

"I that have but to sign and seal
To doom men to the headsman's shears,
Should I, the Lord's anointed, feel
The sting of pain, the smart of tears?
Be stricken of the foeman's steel
Or know the numbing of the years?

"Am I but as some plant that grows
With whin-bound wattles shelter'd warm,
Which, none the less, is one with those
That brave the blast and breast the storm,
Or hath some graft of bramble-rose
All unsuspected, wrought the harm?

"Yet if, forsooth, the thing be so,

And aught be here to taint or mar,

My liegeman shall but cringe more low,

I'll bear me lordlier by far,

So, by the Rood, no man shall know

The King is but as others are!"

TOLD TO THE DOCTOR

(A TURKISH MOTHER'S STORY)

In time of disturbance

“NAY, doctor, I have no need of your help ;
Husband and child must go ;
For the plague-fiend clutches at their throats,
Their hearts beat faint and slow,
To-morrow their beds will be under the ground,
For Allah hath will'd it so !

“It was Shekib's fault, who is lying there,
(His face you shall not see,
It has turn'd so black that was once so fair,)
—I had told him how it would be,
But of all the wilful men upon earth
The wilfullest man was he !

“Ah, doctor, I am no craven-heart,
This hand could strike the blow
To defend mine own in the hour of need
Or to rid myself of a foe,
But to strike at a friend as he lay asleep! . . .
By the Holy Prophet, no!

“I have heard of men athirst for the blood
Of those who were good and true,
Because they bow'd down in a Christian shrine,
And of women who thirsted too,
But we never had cause to take part with these,
And yet what could Shekib do

“In his office of trust? When the order came
What could he have done but obey?
Tho' I, who am only a woman born,
Had surely contrived some way
To strike at a foe instead of a friend
When the order went forth to slay!

“ Still, Shekib, you see, he had his place ;

He felt bound, in some degree,

As village *māktār*, an office of trust,

And he would not be led by me,

But Allah hath taught him a lesson now,

Nor hath spared our children three !

“ Well, it happen'd thus : Hard by our farm

Dwelt some Christians ; man and wife ;

Bedros and Annik, as peaceful a pair

As ever you met in your life,

Tho' the law forbad Bedros to carry a gun,

Or even a girdle-knife.

“ And when I had borne my children three

It was Annik came in to tend :—

Look'd after the pot instead of me,

And was willing to scrub and mend ;

For in sickness or health none so ready as she

To help us and stand our friend.

“And Bedros, too, was as worthy a lad
As ever a mother bore,
Who, when snow lay deep and the ways were bad,
And we could not replenish our store,
Would share with us cheerfully all that he had,
Nor ever keep count of the score.

“And their children three with our children play’d,
And sought for the eggs at morn,
That we never could tell whose hens had laid,
E’en our fowls were such comrades sworn !
And our *hammal* had married their serving-maid,
And to them a son was born.

“So all went well : those were happy days !
Till one fatal Autumn night
When Shekib came back from the distant town
With a face that was gloomy and white,
And he carried a long new knife in his belt,
With a blade that was sharp and bright.

“ ‘My Master,’ I said, and I took his hand,
 ‘What maketh your brow to lour?’
‘There is work to be done, oh, Nadjia,’ he said,
 ‘So Allah but grant me pow’r,
For an order has come from the Padishah
 I must go and kill the Giaour!’

“ ‘Not Bedros?’ I ask’d, and my blood ran cold;
 ‘Yes, Bedros, in truth,’ said he,
‘And not Bedros alone, but Annik his wife,
 And his maid, and his children three,
Tho’ rather than do such a deed of blood
 I had drown’d myself in the sea!’

“ ‘Nay, Shekib,’ I cried, ‘it must not be done,
 No matter at whose behest,
’Twill be none the less an accursèd deed
 That Allah must needs detest;
He’s a bigger King than the Padishah,
 And His service will pay you best!’

“ ‘You *cannot* do it !’ and here I wept,
Then my tears he gently dried ;
‘ I spake but to try you, Nadjia,’ he said,
And he laid him down by my side ;
And anon I slept, for my limbs were tired,
And how could I tell he lied ?

“ I woke with a start at the dawn of day,
And Shekib stood at the door ;
His face was as white as the face of a ghost,
But his hands were all red with gore ;
‘ I have done it !’ he said, and he wiped his knife,
And the blood dripped on to the floor.

“ I said not a word, tho’ my heart stood still,
For words would have done no good :
Well, you know the rest, how we came to town,
And lived on the price of blood,
And how Allah has follow’d us up with His wrath,
As I said from the first He would ;

“With the mastic-drink that the Christians use
To madden the heart and brain,
And the fever of play from morn to eve,
With far more of loss than gain;
'Twas thus vainly that Shekib strove to forget
And wipe out the murder-stain :

“So our home was accurs'd ere the typhus came,
As my husband knew full well,
Tho' I never once spoke of the blood that he spilt
Or dwelt on this tale I tell,
For where was the need to add to the pain
Of a soul already in hell ?

“The children ? . . . (Allah has taken the two,
And the third is well nigh gone,
No power can save it !) You well may ask,
'But what had the children done ?'
True ! but Shekib would suffer to see them die,
For he loved them every one.

“You ask me, ‘But did I not suffer as well?’

There is death at my heart indeed :

But I am but a woman, whose lot is pain,

—Born only to serve and breed,—

Still, Allah is just, and He knoweth right well

That *I* had no hand in the deed !”

IN AN ARABA

"OH, *Araba-ji*, urge on your steeds
That hang their heads and crawl !
I am not a Turk to thus brook delay,
But a Christian traveller on his way
To look at the old town-wall !"

"*Effendi*, where you are seated now,
—Proud as you well may be,—
Last night were the corpses piled by the score,
And 'twas I who drove them down to the shore
To be weighted and cast in the sea ;

“And so fast was I bidden to drive the dead
 Whilst plying to and fro
From Prison to Point, 'neath the waning moon,
That to-day, perforce, in the eye of noon,
 I must drive the living slow!”

ON THE MARMORA

WE were rowing once on that sunny sea

Where the fairy islands lie,

And the far minarets

When daylight sets

Grow purple against the sky,

The white gulls dipped in the rippling tide,

The moon peeped over the sea,

When a woman's shriek

From our light caïque—

“Oh! who may this stranger be?”

He came floating along on the buoyant tide,

Majestic and solemn-faced—

“Deny it who can,

’Tis a murdered man!”

And we shipped our oars in haste.

His eyes stared up as in mute appeal,

Like eyes that would never sleep,

Oh! why did he float

With that gash in his throat,

Who was meant to lie still and deep?

ON THE BOSPHORUS

"BATHE not so near to my window-pane!"

The haughty lady cried,
But the bearded swimmer bore amain
As floating with the tide;

"Nay, get thee hence!" the lady said,

But little he seemed to reck:
Then a wave toss'd over the bearded head
And show'd her a sever'd neck!

WINTER IN ARMENIA

(AN APPEAL TO THE LADIES OF ENGLAND)

YE that lie warm at night whilst cold winds blow,
Whose very lap-dogs sleep on silk and down,
From your luxurious homes in shire and town
In pity let your plenty overflow
For these, your sisters, starving in the snow
Of lands laid waste, whose cries of anguish, blown
Across five seas, re-echo to your own,
And call to you for succour in their woe.

Ye that have mourn'd for father, husband, son,
Snatch'd from your arms despite your anxious care,
Let tender thought of such belovèd one
Move you to make an answer to their pray'r
Who saw their dead lie naked 'neath the sun,
And watch'd the vultures gath'ring in the air !

1895

GO, year of blood ! that from thy harvesting
To cruel snow-time, in the hapless land
That groans, defenceless, 'neath a tyrant's hand
In hated bondage, hast conspired to bring
Death to her thousands, and with wanton wing
Hast the infernal fires of Discord fann'd !
—Pass into Nothingness, abhorr'd and bann'd,
And held, henceforth, for an accursèd thing !

Men shall but speak of thee with bated breath,
The slave, for fear ; lest what hath been may be ;
The Ruler, on his throne, for very shame,
And lest Imperial pow'r be done to death
Because of those foul deeds condoned by thee
Whereof the record makes us loathe thy name !

31st December 1895.

IN A GARDEN

(IN TIME OF QUIET)

HEART of my heart ! it was only a bird
That flew to a cypress-tree ;
Its flight was swift, and its song unheard,
And its colour I could not see ;
But it flew to a tree which a Banksia rose
In blossoming garlands overgrows,
And right out at the end of one garland throws
A tendril towards the sea.

And this was the branch that the swift bird chose
To swing on, against the blue,
Just over a quivering cluster of rose
Whence its light wings scattered the dew ;

So my heart is at peace, and contented, now,

Because I had murmured this inward vow :

“ If a bird should but perch on that furthestmost bough,

I shall know that my love is true ! ”

“ Never the time, and the place,
And the lov'd one, all together ! ”
—BROWNING.

“ WHAT ! ‘ never the time, and the place ’ (did he say),
‘ And the lov'd one, all together ’ ?
(The grey-beard bard that has pass'd away),
Were he here, in this summer weather,—
Could he only have seen the moonbeam's sheen
Flash stars from these oars that feather,—

“ Whilst over the breast of this murmuring stream,
—Past palace and castled-keep,
With no human sound to dispel the dream
Of a love that is wide and deep
As the silvery tide, we ripple and glide
With the rest of the world asleep :—

“ Had the voice of his rash repining ceased,
As he own'd in his words' despite,
That here, by some rare, sweet chance, at least,
Is the time, and the place, and the night,
With a love to bless, midst the strain and stress
That must come with the morning light ?

“ Is there more to desire whatever betide
In the future all unguess'd ?
We are hand in hand, we are side by side. . . .”
When, lo, as his hand I press'd,
I saw but the ghost of the one I lov'd most,
With a heart stone-cold in his breast !

ACCIDENT

FROM sea to sea the wild winds sweep

And lash the fury of the waves ;

Live men are wash'd into the deep,

And dead men from their graves ;

O'er head, the sea-birds whirl and shriek,

The storm-clouds burst, the rains descend ;

The ships at anchor swing and creak

As tho' the world would end.

Three hundred years yon cypress spire

Had sway'd to all the winds that blow,

To-day, the tempest in its ire

Tears up and lays it low.

With climbing roses cluster'd o'er,
We look'd upon it on the ground,
When, lo, embedded in its core,
A thunderbolt was found !

Then much we marvell'd at the fate
Reserved for only one,
When three tall spires beside the gate
Tow'r'd up towards the sun ;

And all unscathed the comrade-trees,
Tho' close as close could be
Each grew to each, the prey of breeze
And bolt, in like degree ;

And seeing all its eighty feet
Laid level with the sod,
We ask'd why *one*, thus, *twice* should meet
The chastisements of God ?

TOLD BY A GIPSY

" I COME of the black-brow'd people
That never could bide the town,
That hawk their wares
At the country fairs
And nestle by dale and down,

" And looking one ev'ning for cresses
Half hidden in willow and weed,
In the river bed
By the old bridge-head
Where the kingfisher flies to feed,

“Just below where the green park ridges
Go stretching for many a mile,
I listen'd and heard
An angry word
From somewhere near to the stile,

“And I saw the Squire and his lady
That had scarce been wedded a year,
And I heard the strife
Betwixt man and wife
That I never was meant to hear ;

“Tho' I knew not what roused his anger,
And turn'd his cheek so pale,
Or what made her rise
With affrighted eyes
And cling to the old bridge rail,

“ For I never heard why they were wrangling,—

(They, sober, and rich, and young !)

But I thought, ‘ Who knows,

They may come to blows ? ’

And out of the weeds I flung.

“ With my flattering gipsy phrases

I sidled between the pair,

‘ You’ve the comely face

Of a lucky race ! ’

I said to the lady fair.

“ As I clutch’d at her slim white fingers

She utter’d a startled cry,

When, only to hide

That I knew her for bride

And for wife of the man hard by,

“I said, ‘You are sad, young lady,
Your sweetheart is far away;
But dry your eyes,
Ere the swallow flies
He will stand where you stand to-day!’

“She yielded her white hand gladly,
I held it within mine own;
‘Ere the rose is dead,’
I softly said,
‘And ere ever the hay is mown.’

“But before I could tell her further,
The Squire, with a moody frown
And an angry stride,
Had left her side
And breasted the Western down;

“Then she cross’d my palm with silver :—

‘Oh, gipsy ! say no more !

In my husband’s face

I can read the trace

Of a terrible time in store !’

“I made for the upland ridges,

I stood by her husband’s side ;—

‘I will turn it to naught,’

To myself I thought,

As he look’d at me wonder-eyed.

“Then I said (but to make him kinder,

The words seeming easy to say),

‘Young sir, ere a year

Your lady dear

Will lie cold in the Church-yard clay ;

“ ‘ I told her another story,
But this is the o’er true tale ! ’
Then I left him there
With a frighten’d stare,
And stood by the grey bridge rail.

“ And I watch’d him await her coming,
Methought, in a kinder mood,
For I saw them stand
Holding hand in hand
Ere they enter’d the oak tree wood :

“ And I thought, ‘ I have soothed his anger
By telling him she will die,
And once they’re agreed
Will he ever take heed
If the gipsy told him a lie ? ’

“ But I come of the black-brow'd people
That never could bide the town,
In whose rough veins flows
The rare blood of those
That were Seers of old renown ;

“ And the words went forth as a bidding
That I found so easy to say,
And in less than a year
That lady dear
Lay cold in the Church-yard clay ;

“ And ere ever the rose was faded,
Or ever the swallow flown,
I saw one stand
From a foreign land,
By the old grey stile alone ;

“And I felt the reproach of murder
As I look'd at his wan white cheek,
But the spirit had moved,
And no voice reproved,
And what could I do but speak ?”

AT PARTING

SHOULD'ST thou and I, thus parting, meet no more
 (For many have not met who parted so),
 Twould ease my aching heart if thou could'st know
The many blessings that I thank thee for ;—
But ever, when I come to count them o'er,
 I find that, as the myriad flow'rs that blow
 In summer-time, or as the flakes of snow
That go to make the Winter white and hoar,

Or as the stars that twinkle overhead
 And light the wayfarer to home and rest,
Or as the drops that fill the ocean's bed
 The number of them may not be express'd ;
Above, below, around, I see them shed,
 Of Life's good gifts the brightest and the best.

THE DYING PACK-HORSE

HE must have thought it passing hard
 (This life he did not ask to brave
 And which he had no pleasure in),
E'en when, the foremost of the guard,
 He pranced along, a willing slave,
 With fly-flicker beneath his chin,

And sabre dangling at his flank,
 Bearing some stout *Bimbashi's* weight
 Throughout the broiling August day,
And 'midst the martial din and clank
 Beheld the Padishah, in state,
 Drive to the Yildez mosque to pray !

Youth then was his ; brave floating tail,
Bright flashing eye and crested mane ;—
The will to dare, the heart to feel !
Yet what to him did this avail
Whose neck curved 'neath a Pasha's rein,
Whose sides heaved 'neath a Pasha's heel ?

A roof, at least, above his head
When night set in, with serving-men
To fill up trough and water-can,
And taste of Freedom, when he sped
With lighten'd burden, now and then,
Across the breezy *Okmeïdān*.

Was this enough ? God's ways are veil'd,
And men's are hard, and youth goes by,
For man and beast as tale that's told !
—A flash, a dream ! . . . The light has paled,
The dream is dream'd, the fount is dry,
And man and beast, alike, wax old !

In other worlds, man fondly deems
He wins reward for worthy deed,
And reaps the harvest sown in tears !
But which of his preceptors dreams
Of compensation to his steed
For all the earthly ills he bears ?

Behold, urged on by lash and goad,
Along the hard and stony ways,
The charger that has pass'd his prime !
A weary pack-horse, 'neath his load
Of broken stones, he dearly pays
The penalty he owes to Time !

For even when his work is done,
By day, by night, without, within,
He wears the galling wooden pack !
—At least it shades him from the sun,
And hides the bones that pierce his skin,
The gnawing sores that scar his back !

And when relieved of this last weight,
With all its clasps and thongs that bind,
His labours near their end indeed !
See, there, abandoned to his fate,
He limps about, halt, lame, and blind,
The very spectre of a steed !

The tyrant man, who held in thrall
Blood, bone, and muscle, for his use,
At last, has drain'd his life-springs dry !
Not one kick left in him ! for all
His goading, cursing, and abuse,
So man has turn'd him out to die !

So flat he lies upon the sward ;
A mere white rag against the green !
The snarling mongrels, scenting food,
Round his last bed keep watch and ward ;
Ah, scarce will one so poor and lean
Feed all that hungry multitude !

A CHINESE STORY

POOR Chung Ching Yü had been condemned to death,
But was allow'd to spend his latest breath
In conversation with his loving wife :
Now this was why he had to lose his life :

—When Chung Ching Yü became a Magistrate
He knew the risks attendant on his state,
Its penalties and forfeits, so, to-day,
Could not complain if Custom had her way.
—This was the law : If any one should die
By murder foul, it was his task to try
To find the miscreant who did the deed ;
Nor this alone ; he further must succeed

In making public, and in tracing out,
The way in which the murder came about,
And if he fail'd in this, then, woe betide
The hapless Magistrate ! 'twas he who died !

Now, as it happen'd, in that very town,
A worthy citizen was stricken down
In all the pride of manhood. Not a sign
Of how the slayer compass'd his design !
No scratch, or puncture, strangulation-mark,
Or trace of poison, yet the man lay stark !
And no one seem'd to think that he might die
From natural causes, tho' I know not why.

So Chung Ching Yü was straight condemned to death,
Yet was allow'd to spend his latest breath
Amongst his family. Then said his wife :
“ This man, for whom you have to lose your life—
When looking at his body, could you find
No marks of violence of any kind ? ”

"None!" sigh'd her husband sadly. "Did you look?"

(Then said the lady, as she straightway took,

With tender hands, his plaited tail of hair

And held it upwards), "Did you look *just there*?"

(She pointed with her finger to the part

Just under where the pig-tail took its start.)

"No!" said her husband, wond'ring as he stood,

"Well," said the lady, "then I think you should!"

Believing in his wife's superior wit

The corpse is sent for, and the lawyers sit

In solemn conclave round it. By-and-by,

The Magistrate, with eager straining eye,

Raises the braided tress, when, 'neath the tail,

The overjoy'd official finds—*a nail!* . . .

Now, all that follows is as clear as day!

—Who could thus kill him in this cruel way?

—Lift up his pig-tail, and, unhindered, drive

A nail into a waking man, alive,

Upright, and ready to defend his life ? . . .
'Twas done whilst he was sleeping, by—his wife ! . . .
And so it proved ! . . . Now praise and honours wait,
Or, rather, *pour*, upon the Magistrate
Who thus, tho' late, has proved himself to be
Endow'd with wisdom of such high degree.
Exalted, courted, now behold him stand
Amongst the noblest persons in the land ;
Joy follows mourning, stormy skies turn blue,
Nor does he fail to do as he should do,
But show'rs rich presents on his loving wife,
Who, by her cleverness, has saved his life.

But never, here below, was perfect bliss !
(How often have the sages told us this !)
Day follows day, and in a month's short span
He seems, once more, a sorrow-burden'd man.
—He muses thus : “ How did she come to know
A wife would ever use her husband so ? ” . . .

Raised, praised, and flatter'd, e'en beyond his bent,
He thus endures a growing discontent ;
One thought pursues him, like a gnawing ache,
And never leaves him, sleeping or awake.

—He soon grows moody—wanders off alone ;
Eats next to nothing, shrinks to skin and bone ;
Or, when it pleases him to stay at home,
Sits buried all day long in learnèd tome.
—He studies “ Precedents,” “ Effect and Cause ” ;
Reads thro' old compilations of the laws ;
Pamphlets upon statistics, with all crimes
Reduced to average, from earliest times ;
—Watches his wife attentively, and so
Comes to discover what he did not know
(Her wit and beauty having turn'd his head),
That she had been a widow when she wed
(A fact she had conceal'd). But why rehearse
The tale of his decline from bad to worse ? . . .
—Officious neighbours stimulate his zeal ;
Suspicion treads on mere Conjecture's heel ;—

Fancy grows into Fact, and stands betray'd
In more than usual ugliness array'd ;
Until, one day, in magisterial tones,
He orders up the former husband's bones,—
These they procure him, delved from underground,
In solemn state the men of law sit round
To view the skeleton, then, by-and-by,
The Magistrate, with eager-straining eye,
Raises the tress, when, wedged beneath the tail,
The horrified official finds—*a nail!*

I am indebted to Mr. G. N. E. Eliot, sometime a distinguished member of the British Embassy, Constantinople, for the foregoing story. It formed the plot of a domestic drama at which he had assisted when travelling near the Russo-Chinese Frontier.

THE "ISOLATION" OF ENGLAND

WASH'D by the waves that have kept her free
From the curse of a foreign thrall,
Of the lands that be by the wild North Sea
She was one of the least of all.

But her sons drew fire from her cloudy sky,
Ever eager to dare and do,
And their hearts beat high as the years went by
With a longing for pastures new ;

To journey afar, by land and sea,
To endure, to achieve, to know ;
To hear and see, to fight and free,
And to gain new wisdom so ;

To brave new dangers by night and day ;
New heights to discern and climb ;
Wild men to sway, and wild beasts to slay ;—
This came with the throb of Time ;

Till she look'd and saw, with a mother's pride,
As her zenith of pow'r drew near,
That on ev'ry tide did their galleys ride,
Whilst their homes were in every sphere ;

And her sons were as kings, uncrown'd, and crown'd,
And her daughters, the brides of kings,
And a chain was wound the whole world round
That was welded of English rings ;

And her wealth increased without let or check,
And her cities throve and spread,
Till, from only a speck, as of white foam-fleck,
She had grown to a world instead.

What if, since the dawn of her pow'r began,
Her mien has been proud and high ?
She fears no man in the wide world's span,
So why should she cringe and lie ?

She seeks no strife, and owes no man aught,
She would rest on her own green sward,
And turn her to thought, who has wrought, and taught,
And breasted both fire and sword ;

But why should we credit the craven lie
That our England stands alone,
When her brave sons die under every sky
And have empire in every zone,

Where her flag, whether winds blow foul or fair,
Waves high against grey or blue,
And why need she care for Wolf, Eagle, or Bear,
If her own Lion-cubs stand true ?

"ONLY A DOG !"

BRIGHT-EYED companion ! when you seek to prove,
While round my path the storm-clouds gather black,
The depth of your unutterable love,
What is the "soul" some tell me that you lack ?
Is it not that same spark which (as God's air
May blow at will thro' princely palace panes
Or some poor peasant's hovel, and may share
The glory of the swelling organ-strains
Or lend the pan-pipe of the shepherd-boy
Its cruder music) animates with flame
The greatest and the lowest that enjoy
This breath of life, which might have seem'd the same
In man and beast, but for the outer shell,
The special mechanism that controls
And thro' each subtle valve of nerve and cell
Elaborates what mortals call their "souls" ?

In you, it may be that the vital ray
Shines not from out a many-sconced link,
E'en as a little rush-light burns away,
Or little reed-pipe from the river's brink
Set to a shepherd's lip, upon the breeze
Flings forth a fluting treble, even so
The instrument, or, call it what you please,
The channel thro' the which your feelings flow,
Limits your soul's expansion, circumscribes
The freedom and the fleetness of her wing,
Her voice's compass, yet, despite the gibes
Of those who deem you but a soulless thing,
I feel some ray of the Eternal Light,
Some note divine, is surely here indeed,
In rough-hewn torch I watch it beaming bright,
And recognise its music in the reed.

THE MIDDLE PLACE

. . . "brute beasts that have no understanding."

I

THESE beasts that "understand" not, that exist,
Draw breath, enjoy warm sunshine and cool breeze—
That might be free to wander at their ease
And mate, feed, fight, and slumber as they list;
What was the joy in living that they miss'd
Ere man imposed his pitiless decrees
On all poor sentient creatures, and of these
Made slaves and subjects even ere they wist?

Nay, without hope of heav'n or fear of hell,
Knew they not all the fleeting joys we know,
These poor "brute beasts," that mourn'd no overthrow

Of Hope or Love, nor felt Ambition swell
To die in dreams, or Faith, fantastic, glow,
And raised no gods of clay that broke or fell ?

II

We that have made us lords, alike, of brute,
And fish, and fowl, and ev'ry creeping thing :—
That make their necks to bow, and set a ring
Within their nostrils, and by hot pursuit
And torture of them, prove our absolute
And proud dominion ; doth such empire bring
Release from one dark hour of suffering,
Or sweeten for us Wisdom's bitter fruit ?

Lo, we are not as beasts ; we “ understand ” ! . . .
Yet we, too, bow the neck beneath the rod
Wielded in silence by the chast'ning hand
Of One we, understanding not, call “ God ” ;
Whilst blinder than the beasts in this our night,
We cannot even see the thongs that smite !

III

To be as fabled gods ; to bless and curse,
Reward and punish, fitly make or mar ;
Direct the course of ev'ry wandering star,
Command the storm to gather or disperse,
And, unperturbed, to rule the universe ;—
Or else, to be as happy creatures are
That roam at large, unpenned by latch or bar,
And grieve for nothing evil or perverse ;—

This had been well, but lo, betwixt the two,
Half god, half brute, man takes the middle path
With faltering footsteps and appealing hands ;—
Ignorant, vain, yet strong to dare and do—
Oh Lord, be merciful, nor shed Thy wrath,
On one who so obscurely “ understands ” !

A PICTURE

(*En Grisaille*)

BESIDE a trickling stream that sheds
Its waters at the ocean's brim,
And where a mighty plane-tree spreads
As grey and gaunt of garb and limb,

She crouches on the grey sea-wall,
A grey old woman, clad in grey ;
From morning-rise to even-fall
She stirreth not the live-long day ;

A sad, half-shrouded falcon-face,
Swathed in the head-gear of her kind,
Whereon the passer's eye may trace
The symbols of a shrouded mind ;

And just above the waterfall,
Only a span below her feet,
A grey tomb, fashioned in the wall,
Reveals some *Imām's* last retreat.

Thus sits she on, "year out, year in,"
Her hands clasped idly round her knee ;
She toils not, neither doth she spin,
But stares at all her eyes can see,—

The restless waves, the changing sky,
The glow of sunset on the shore,
The sights that, as the years went by,
Her eyes had seen so oft before,

Whilst all so mute her air and mien,
So fix'd her gaze that seeks the sea,
You well might fancy she had been
But one with tombstone, wall, and tree.

If without stress of strife or thought,
 Merely thro' Nature's potent spell,
Wisdom can be thus cheaply bought,
 She should have learnt Life's lessons well,

And with no knowledge of the lore
 That came, betimes, to you and me,
Her simple mind must surely store
 Rare secrets glean'd from sky and sea !

IN EXILE

OH, rooks that look like English rooks,
And whirl against the grey !
Oh, skies that look like English skies,
Two thousand miles away !

Oh, eyes that look on rooks and skies,
Why do ye fill with tears ?
Oh, mysteries, and memories,
And changes of the years !

EXPERIENCE

“The middle-aged, who have lived through their strongest emotions, but are yet in the time when memory is still half-passionate and not merely contemplative, should surely be a sort of natural priesthood, whom life has disciplined and consecrated to be the refuge and rescue of early stumblers and victims of self-despair.”—GEORGE ELIOT.

ERE one can play fair Juliet on the stage
They say we must have reach'd her nurse's age ;
ERE we can know Love as he really is
They say we must grow callous to his kiss ;
Yet, wherefore thus ? for, surely, did the wise
Instruct our ignorance, and lend us eyes,
Poor Juliet need not evermore be old,
Or Love appraised but when the heart is cold ?
Could these not teach and preach ? . . . Nay, loud and clear
They teach and preach to ears that will not hear !

GHOSTS

I LOOK behind me as the shadows close,
And in the twilight, seem to see them stand—
Dead God-created people, and all those
That man, God's image, fashion'd with his hand ;

Flesh of his flesh, the creatures of his brain—
Cursed with like passions, and yet spared his doom,
Who only lived in books, but still remain
Whilst their creators moulder in the tomb,

These mingle with the ghosts of men who knew
More ardent heart-beats, breathed intenser breath ;
Yet, thro' so surely living, surely drew
Each moment nearer to a certain death.

And as I mark them lurking in the shade
Beside the highway that my feet have trod,
More life-like seem the forms man's mind hath made,
Than some pale phantoms from the hand of God !

?

A HAPPY child with laughing eyes,
That look'd out at the falling rain,
And, as a pastime, tortured flies,
When chided, answer'd in this wise :
"They are too little to feel pain !"

I wonder oft, if He who plann'd
This transient life, and rules our fate,
Can estimate and understand
The pangs we suffer at His hand,
Or if He be too great ?

Launch'd on the tide we know not whence—

(Since Life and Death are His to give),

Mere atoms, restless and intense,

Have we attain'd to keener sense

Than He design'd who bade us live ?

Whilst blind, thro' very breadth of sight,

To insect-wounds, from no ill-will

Doth He, unconscious of His might,

Only for aimless pastime smite,

Leaning from Heav'n's high window-sill ?

A TURKISH JAY'S FEATHER

OH, barr'd blue feather of the jay !

The wings that shed thee waft me far,
To those calm realms of yesterday
From these, the changeful days that are ;

When, where this mighty forest flings
Its shadows 'neath a foreign sky,
And only unfamiliar things
Are wont to meet the wond'ring eye,

Bright, 'midst the leaves which many a year
Has strewn beside the woodland way,
Lo, I behold thee lying here,
Oh, barr'd blue feather of the jay !

So small a thing ! and yet, in truth,
As I descry thy vivid hue,
Faith, Hope, and Trust, and vanish'd Youth,
Seem to revive and bloom anew,

And I remember, long ago,
As once, a pensive child, I stray'd
With floating locks and eyes cast low
Beneath as dense a forest shade,

In that grey land that gave me birth,
I saw, on some such autumn day,
Thy blue against the brown of earth,
Oh, bright barr'd feather of the jay !

Did ever after-treasure-trove
Impart a thrill of joy so wild ?
Seem'd Fame, or Wealth, or crowning Love,
Worth that blue feather to the child ?

Treasures of youth, so fondly sought !
Like that bright feather of the jay,
How have ye turn'd to things of naught
Since golden locks have changed to grey !

If those we cling to in our prime
Have yet the pow'r to please or bless,
God grant us that the touch of Time
May spare the few we still possess !

I know thee now for what thou art,
Who see with sadder eyes to-day,
Yet come and nestle near my heart,
Oh, barr'd blue feather of the jay !

Forest of Belgrade, 1897.

NOW

THIS *is* ! . . . The moments will not stay their wings ;
To-morrow presses ; it is still "To-day" ;
Shall we stretch arms and snatch at what it brings ?
Say, darling, say !

The great grave clock's two hands, uplifted, seen
Mutely reproachful. They will scarcely veer
One poor inch onward when our life-long dream
To-day, is here !

And after ? . . . Will it turn to dream, or less ?
A fading memory to you and me ? . .
Nay, till we make the venture dare we guess
What it will be ?

This *is* ! . . . The moments will not stay their wings ;

To-morrow presses ; it is still " To-day " ;

Shall we stretch arms and snatch at what it brings ?

Say, darling, say !

TO AN ASCETIC

SUPPOSE the God you pray to night and day
To be, tho' fifty-fold more good and great—
The type of some mere earthly father, say—
A parent loving and compassionate ;

Who, sparing nothing for His children's good,
Gave them fair fields and gardens, and for home
Some marble palace wrought with cedar wood
And lordly pleasancess wherein to roam ;

How would the children seek to best display
Their gratitude for gracious favours shown ?
By droning forth that all must pass away,
That no one blessing was their very own ?

That this was bitterness and that was vain,
Their father's scheme so shameless and debased
His greatest gift were best flung back again
As outraging His children's nicer taste ?

Were it not meet that with songs of praise
They strove, albeit in vain, to celebrate
The goodness of each gift, and sought to raise
The poor and hopeless to their high estate ?

Whilst looking on His fields and gardens fair
With happy eyes, and when they pass'd within
Their marble palace, taking pleasure there
In all His bounties without thought of sin ?

So, surely those are erring or misled
Who, bless'd with plenty, daily make their moan
And strive to prove the One who gave them bread
More honour'd could they turn it to a stone ?

And you, pale anchorite, who live on roots,
And macerate the flesh, and sleep on straw,
And look on Love as only fit for brutes,
Are you so sure you read aright God's law ?

WHAT SOME SAY TO THEMSELVES

“ I SHALL compass one day what I mean to achieve ;

My house shall be garnished, my table spread,
And this medley of dreams that I daily weave
Shall be all disentangled thread by thread,

“ This will have to be painted and that repair'd,

And this other re-fashion'd, in other wise ;—
This plough'd and replanted, that fell'd and bared,
And this match'd to that other in form and size,

“ I must build up that wall, too, and sink me a well

Whose water shall be as the crystal clear,
And create me a home where content shall dwell
As my days are accomplished year by year.

“ I would scorn to wed either for lands or for gold,
So shall only mate at mine own free will
With one that I seek for, to have and hold
In health and in sickness, thro’ good and ill,

“ Thus courage and virtue they should not lack,
The sons and the daughters that bear my name,
And they never need turn from the beaten track,
Into hidden byways of sin and shame.

“ But I now have no leisure for thought or for quest,—
I must wait till this pressure of days is o’er ;—
And after it all I shall take my rest.” . . .
Beware that thou takest it not *before* !

A TRANSPLANTED SNOWDROP

“ Lo ! lately waken'd from a wintry sleep,
Deeming myself in mossy English glen,
I hang my head abash'd, afraid to peep
Out at this magic world of turban'd men !

“ The vault of heaven beams a brighter blue
Seen thro' strange branches wherein new birds sing,
And unknown blossoms scent the air, and strew
The patch of alien earth wherefrom I spring ;

“ An exiled colony, behold, we stand,
To brave we know not what in days to come,
E'en tho' our offspring grow to love the land,
And, little recking, learn to deem it home.

“ Yet, if, altho' remote from English vales,
Some vague impression stirs them to the core,—
If each pale drooping petal further pales
With mystic sense of having bloom'd before ;

“ If half-remember'd whispers from afar
Reach them in broken murmurs ; dreams of dreams ;
If things that *were* blend with the things that *are*,
In part reveal'd by fitful thrills and gleams ;

“ The aspen's quiver, or the thrush's lay,
The scent of primroses in hidden dells ;
The salt sea breeze upon the breath of May,
The distant chime of Christian village bells ;

“ And these, the sights and sounds of long ago,
Cause them to quail and falter, or to pine
Beside the marble terrace where they blow
Beneath the mastic trees in trembling line ;

“ Ye turban'd men who tend these garden-beds

And are, to us, what Allah is to you !

Bear with their mood, nor trample on their heads

With turn'd up shoe ! ”

FROM this white house that faces the Black Sea
Whereof the windows look like waiting eyes
Expectant of the changes that may be,
What human eyes will look, as daylight dies ?
Daylight of days that will not dawn for me
In this white house that faces the Black Sea !

On summer mornings, who, at break of day,
Will peep between the painted shutter-slide
And watch the clumsy dolphins as they play
And snort and tumble in the glittering tide ?
Whose footsteps will ascend the rocky way
Which leads to where my own were wont to stray ?

Then, as to-day, along the ocean line
The great white ships will pass upon their way,
—The lesser craft, aglint with sun and shine,
Will speck the strait, to-morrow, as to-day,
When, gazing thus, with your dear hand in mine,
I watch the sea-birds dip into the brine ;

And this white house that faces the Black Sea
Will still stand on, should storm or earthquake spare,
And all will be as it was wont to be
Save that the stranger will inhabit there
Till dimming years may make it seem to me
A white dream-house facing a phantom sea !

Therapia, 1897.

THE LESSON

WHAT is the lesson stern that changing years

Would teach my heart ?

Whatever aspect fickle Fortune wears

Bear thou thy part ;

Daily they fade, thy dearest hopes and dreams ?

Friends disappear ?

Life hath its unexpected after-gleams,

Storms break and clear ;

For that lost love that bless'd thy vanished prime

Longest thou still ?

Soon shall the petrifying touch of Time

Heal ev'ry ill !

Weepest thou yet where thy belov'd lies low,

Cold and alone ?

Strive daily that thine aching heart may grow

Hard as that stone !

Mournest thou those that have turn'd cold and strange

Without Death's touch ?

Nought that can happen in a world of change

Counteth for much !

Toil thou, or take thy leisure, early, late,

Fail or succeed ;—

Cry out, in thy despair, to God or Fate

Who shall take heed ?

Into my heart this lesson changing years

Would sear and burn :

Alas, a lesson that, despite my tears,

I cannot learn !


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